

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Aug. 30, 2006**

**For More Information Contact**

**VDH 06-49**

Rebecca K. Odor, Director of Sexual and Domestic Violence Prevention (804) 864-7740

Charles Ford, PIO (804) 864-7668

## **HEALTH OFFICIALS HELP SCHOOLS CRACK DOWN ON BULLYING**

(RICHMOND, Va.)—Pop quizzes, spelling tests and book reports are in store for thousands of Virginia children as they head back to school this fall. Unfortunately, many kids are also likely to encounter a bully. That's why the Virginia Department of Health has teamed up with Virginia Commonwealth University and local schools across the state to implement a bullying prevention program beginning in September.

"Bullying has the potential to develop into very serious violent behavior including partner abuse, child maltreatment, suicide, sexual abuse and youth violence," said State Health Commissioner Robert B. Stroube, M.D., M.P.H. "This program directly addresses the behavioral tendencies that lead to becoming a bully or a victim and works to prevent all forms of violence directed by or at children and adolescents."

The project is funded by a grant of \$290,615 from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for each of three years, 2006-2009. Virginia will use the Olweus Bully Prevention Program, first implemented throughout Norway. It addresses individual behaviors, bystander behavior, promotes social skills that affect the interaction between bully and victim, and promotes parent and community education and collaboration.

The U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration found that the Olweus program reduced student reports of being bullied and bullying others by 30 percent to 70 percent. It also significantly reduced students' reports of general antisocial behavior, such as vandalism, fighting and theft, and significantly improved classroom order and discipline and fostered a more positive attitude toward schoolwork and school.

Bullying is all too common in Virginia. During the 2003-2004 school year, the Virginia Department of Education reported 12,709 incidents of crime and violence against public school students. These events included physical assault with and without weapons, threats, bullying and one attempted rape. Another 89 incidents involving firearms occurred on school property. There were 21,128 incidents of fighting with no or minor injuries and 1,336 incidents of fighting that resulted in serious injury.

### **Is your child a bully?**

Bullying occurs when one or more students repeatedly and over time subject other students to negative actions that include intentional physical attacks such as hitting. Other forms of bullying include obscene gestures or exclusion from a group, and verbal attacks such as threatening, malicious teasing and spreading rumors.

### **Characteristics of bullies include:**

- An impulsive, hotheaded, dominant personality;
- lack of empathy;
- difficulty conforming to rules;
- a positive attitude toward violence;
- poor conflict-resolution skills; and
- physical strength.

(more)

Page Two  
Bullying

If you think your child may be involved in bullying or is being subjected to bullying, alert school officials and teachers and work with them to resolve the problem. Information for schools that want to implement the Olweus program and more on the effects of bullying in Virginia can be found at [www.vahealth.org/civp](http://www.vahealth.org/civp).

###